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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 001429

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR JO

SUBJECT: OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW; KING RECONFIGURES ROYAL COURT

Classified By: AMBASSADOR EDWARD W. GNEHM FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) King Abdullah revamped the Royal Court on March 9, replacing his most senior advisor, Chief of the Royal Court Fayez Tarawneh, and creating a new Cabinet position with the title Minister of the Royal Court. End Summary.

NEW ROYAL COURT: NEW FACES

¶12. (C) In an unexpected move, King Abdullah issued a royal decree on March 9 appointing Chief of the Royal Court, Fayez Tarawneh, to the Senate. Tarawneh had been in his position for four years and was substantively engaged with the King on many issues. (Comment: The King has often used appointment to the Senate as a way to gracefully retire a senior official he wishes to replace. End Comment.)

¶13. (C) His replacement on the Court is Yousef Dalabih, who most recently served as Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs in Prime Minister Abul Ragheb's first Cabinet (June 2000-June 2001). Dalabih is from the prominent East Bank Bani Hassan tribe. After graduating from Sandhurst military academy in 1964, Dalabih rose to the rank of General in the Army before his service in the Cabinet. Dalabih had a fairly low profile in the government and is not well known to the Embassy. Among our contacts, he is known as an administrator, not a politician, and is generally well respected.

¶14. (C) King Abdullah also reinstated the Cabinet position of Minister of the Royal Court and appointed Faisal al-Fayez, the Chief of Royal Protocol to the position. Al-Fayez is from the prominent Bani Sakher tribe. The King also named Emad Fakhouri as the General Coordinator of Royal Court planning and Sharif Mohammad Ben Abdul Hamid Altuhaymaq replaced Fayez as the Chief of Royal Protocol.

¶15. (C) Emad Fakhouri, a well known contact of the Embassy, most recently served as Investment and Development Commissioner at the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority. In his role there, Fakhouri was enthusiastic, bright, and hard-working. He was one of the few commissioners who rejected the "Excellency" title, an indication that he saw his work as a job rather than an honorific. Sharif Mohammad has previously worked protocol issues at the Royal Court and was the Court's point of contact during Vice President Cheney's visit to Jordan last year. Mohammad has traveled to the US and UK, and worked closely with the embassy-sponsored American Language School to sponsor English language training for Palace staff. He also has private sector experience in a local Public Relations firm.

¶16. (C) FM Muasher, in a conversation with the Ambassador, commented that the changes in the Royal Court reflect a general downgrading of its function. In addition to removing some holdovers from King Hussein's reign (e.g. Tarawneh), King Abdullah appears to be creating a Royal Court with a more administrative, rather than advisory, role. One Embassy contact opined that the King appointed men from two key tribes so they could handle any tribal dissension if there are hostilities with Iraq. "A tribesman to deal with his tribe in their own language."

COMMENT

¶17. (C) The reshuffle in the Royal Court staff will make it a more administrative and support organization. Former Court Chief Tarawneh, who often participated in King Abdullah's substantive meetings, is out. New Royal Court Minister Fayez, who served a largely support and scheduling function as Chief of Protocol, has been elevated. This move seems to indicate that the King wishes to get his policy advice from quarters formally outside the Palace.

GNEHM